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KENNETH ANGER'S MAGICK LANTERN CYCLE

In *Visionary Film*, P. Adams Sitney writes, "Kenneth Anger more than any other avant-garde filmmaker, is the conscious artificer of his own myth." A "Hollywood baby," Anger, whose grandmother was a costume mistress in silent films, appeared as the child prince in Max Reinhardt's movie *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, danced with Shirley Temple, and, in short, was steeped in the ambience of Tinsel Town. The paradox of Hollywood—beautiful dreams and sordid realities—has remained a center of fascination for him and led him to write his infamous book *Hollywood Babylon*.

But Anger cannot be passed off as a scandal-monger; he is a Magus, a master magician, and to him, Hollywood and its myths are merely part of a much larger whole all encompassed by Magick. As Carel Rowe writes in "Illuminating Lucifer," *Film Quarterly*:

> For Anger, "Making a movie is casting a spell." He claims "Magick" as his "lifework" and "the cinematograph" for his "Magick weapon." He dubs the collection of his works "The Magick Lantern Cycle," has adopted Aleister Crowley as his guru, sees films to be "a search for light and enlightenment" and sees Lucifer not as the devil but as "Venus—the Morning Star." To date, all of his films have been evocations or invocations, attempting to conjure primal forces which, once visually released, are designed to have the effect of "casting a spell" on the audience. The Magick *in* the film is related to the Magickal effect of the film *on* the audience.

In Anger's works, talismans—hieroglyphs, pictographs, trademarks, tattoos, etc.—figure as "magickal marks on the wall." Color and music are also keys to Magickal workings—both cinematic (as per Sergei Eisenstein's *chromophonic*—color/sound—montage) and alchemical (Crowley's color system from the *Golden Dawn*, an occult order).

But his films can be enjoyed on many levels, and a viewer does not necessarily have to be familiar with Magick to appreciate the beauty and strength of Kenneth Anger's cinema.

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Fireworks
1947, black & white, 15 minutes
Concept, direction and editing by Kenneth Anger. Camera assistant: Chester Kessler. Music by Respighi. Filmed in Hollywood. Cast: Kenneth Anger (Dreamer), Gordon Gray (First Sailor), Bill Seltzer (Second Sailor).

Fireworks, made when Anger was only seventeen during a long weekend when his parents were away, with footage stolen from the U.S. Navy, is the earliest of his works to survive. It is a homo-erotic dream within a dream in which a young man, through a series of violent and ecstatic encounters, undergoes his rite of passage.

> In *Fireworks* I released all the explosive pyrotechnics of a dream. Inflammable desires dampened by day under the cold water of consciousness are ignited that night by the libertarian matches of sleep and burst forth in showers of shimmering incandescence. These imaginary displays provide a temporary release. A dissatisfied dreamer awakes, goes out in the night seeking a "light" and is drawn through the needle's eye. A dream of a dream, he returns to a bed less empty than before. (Kenneth Anger)
>
> The science and art of causing change to occur in conformity with the Will. Magick is the Science of understanding oneself and one's conditions. It is the Art of applying that understanding in action. (Aleister Crowley)
>
> On a higher level: the viewer who recognises that *Fireworks* corresponds to the Magick ritual The Building of the Pyramid (a process of *self*-initiation, in which the candidate *confesses)* will appreciate more keenly what the film meant and means to Anger. (Tony Rayns, "A Kenneth Anger Kompendium," *Cinema)*

The dream of aggression has as its target not only Anger himself, but the external society which acts as omnipotent repressive force. Thus in its iconography of matches, Christmas trees and roman candles, it satirizes social institutions in the manner of Bunuel's *L'Age d'Or.* As Anger has ironically put it: "This flick is all I have to say about being seventeen, the United States Navy, American Christmas and the Fourth of July." (Lucy Fischer, "Essay 1," *A History of the American Avant-Garde Cinema)*

Rabbit's Moon
1950, revised 1978, color, 8 minutes
Concept, direction and editing by Kenneth Anger. Camera Assistant: Tourjansky. Music by Andy Arthur. Filmed in Paris. Cast: Andre Soubeyran (Pierrot), Claude Revenant (Harlequin), Nadine Valence (Columbine).

Pierrot unsuccessfully reaching for the Moon and for Columbine, to the music of Andy Arthur.

> Fable of the Unattainable (the Moon) combining elements of Commedia Dell'Arte with Japanese myth.
>
> A lunar dream utilizing the classic pantomime figure of Pierrot in an encounter with a prankish, enchanted Magic Lantern . . . (Kenneth Anger)

The Japanese myth to which Anger refers is that a white rabbit lives in the moon. He says, "It's interesting that the Japanese do not see a 'face' or Man in the Moon as we Westerners do, but see a mythological animal, the white rabbit." *Rabbit's Moon,* as Anger points out, interrelates this myth with the Italian Commedia Dell'Arte "with the 'moon lover Pierrot (Pierrot Lunaire),' and Lucifer-Harlequin with his apparition to lure Pierrot to his doom, Columbine."

> In 1950, Kenneth Anger attempted suicide in Paris. *Rabbit's Moon* is a transposed, highly poeticized transposition of that incident. It was shot in the studio belonging to director Jean-Pierre Melville which had been lent to Anger. After a few days of shooting, Melville unexpectedly reclaimed his studio, although the film was not completed. *Moon* remained a "lost" film for twenty years, until Anger finally edited it in 1970, then adding a musical score. This disturbing fable takes place in an extraordinary tinselly forest, somewhat similar in texture to the fairy woodland in the Max Reinhardt-William Dieterle *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Warner Brothers, 1935) in which Anger appeared as a child actor.
>
> All of Anger's films are separate movements in one vast film, a large symphony, in which all kinds of rituals occur—as here with the stultifying return of zoom after zoom into the blinding full moon which looks down on the progress of Pierrot from romantic illusion to destruction. If Pierrot is Anger himself, then Pierrot's new toy, the Magick Lantern, is obviously the cinema. *Rabbit's Moon* is exquisitely beautiful claustrophobic psychodrama. (Elliott Stein, *Caligari's Cabinet and Other Grand Illusions)*

(Note: the print of *Rabbit's Moon* included in the *Magick Lantern Cycle* is Anger's latest version of the film. It has been step-printed to increase the pace, the music has been changed from the earlier Temptations soundtrack, and the zooms to which Elliott Stein refers have been removed.)

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Eaux d'Artifice
1953, color, 13 minutes
Concept, direction and editing by Kenneth Anger. Camera assistant: Thad Lovett. Music by Vivaldi. Filmed in Tivoli (Italy). Cast: Carmila Salvatorelli (Lady).

Tuned to Vivaldi's "The Four Seasons," a Baroque lady flits in and out of Rome's Tivoli Fountain until she melts into the waters.

Eaux d'Artifice, featuring a circus dwarf Anger met in Italy, owes its costume design to Anger's grandmother in whose costumes he as a boy loved dressing up. Anger calls the Lady in the film "a Firbank heroine in pursuit of a nightmoth," which allusion P. Adams Sitney traces to Ronald Firbank's novel *Valmouth* "where Niki-Esther, at the time of her marriage, went into the garden in pursuit of a butterfly, dressed in her wedding gown and carrying her bouquet."

The film was shot in black & white and printed through a blue filter and the Lady's "Fan of Exorcism" was hand-tinted by Anger. Of all his works, this is perhaps the most abstract; the rushing, flowing, trickling waters become interesting as shapes and rhythms.

> "Pour water on thyself: thus shalt thou be a Fountain to the universe. Find thou thyself in every Star! Achieve thou every possibility!" *Khaled Khan, The Heart of the Master, Theorem V.* Hide and seek in a night-time labyrinth of levels, cascades, balustrades, grottoes, and ever-gushing leaping fountains, until the Water Witch and the Fountain become One. Dedicated to Pavel Tchlatchev. (Kenneth Anger)
>
> *Eaux d'Artifice* retells *Fireworks* in opposite terms. The Lady enters the "night-time labyrinth of cascades, balustrades, grottoes and fountains," and tries to lure out the monsters with her fan; she's trying to invoke the water gods. Anger's own happy analogy is a middle-aged queen cruising for rough trade. She fails, being weak and frivolous, and melts into the water (surrenders her identity) so that she can play on. (Tony Rayns)

Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome
1954, color, 38 minutes
Concept, direction and editing by Kenneth Anger. Camera assistant: Robert Straede. Music by Electric Light Orchestra. Filmed in Hollywood. Cast: Samson De Brier (Lord Shiva, Osiris, The Great Beast), Cameron (The Scarlet Woman, Kali), Joan Whitney (Aphrodite), Katy Kadell (Isis), Renata Loome (Lilith), Anaïs Nin (Astarte), Paul Mathison (Pan), Curtis Harrington (Slave), Kenneth Anger (Hecate), Peter Loome (Ganymede).

A hallucinatory Dionysic and Eucharistic ritual with multi-layered imagery in which magicians appear as figures from mythology and engage in an Orgia *orchestrated by Lord Shiva.*

Inauguration has gone through several incarnations—at least four according to P. Adams Sitney in *Visionary Film.* Sitney says the first had a soundtrack by Harry Partch; the second, in distribution up to 1966, used Janacek's "Glagolithic Mass" for a soundtrack. In 1958, Anger made a version of the film in which the screen "grew wings" for a synchronous projection at its climax. In 1966, this version, with additional superimposition, consisting of most of *Puce Woman* and Harry Lachman's *Dante's Inferno,* in the last third of the film and an opening reading of Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* accompanied by stills of Crowley and talismanic symbols, became known as the Sacred Mushroom edition. In 1975, Anger added the present soundtrack. Perhaps in future years, the film will again change.

> Lord Shiva, the Magician, awakes. A convocation of Theurgists in the guise of figures from mythology bearing gifts: The Scarlet Woman, Whore of Heaven, smokes a big fat joint; Astarte of the Moon brings the wings of snow; Pan bestows the bunch of Bacchus; Hecate offers the Sacred Mushroom, Yage, Wormwood Brew. The vintage of Hecate is poured; Pan's cup is poisoned by Lord Shiva. The *Orgia* ensues; a Magick masquerade party at which Pan is the prize. Lady Kali blesses the rites of the Children of the Light as Lord Shiva invokes the Godhead with the formula, *"Force and Fire,"* Dedicated to the Few and to Aleister Crowley; and to the Crowned and Conquering Child. (Kenneth Anger)
>
> The film is derived from one of Crowley's dramatic rituals where people in the cult assume the identity of a god or a goddess. In other words, it's the equivalent of a masquerade party—they plan this for a whole year and on All Sabbath's Eve they come as gods and goddesses that they have identified with and the whole thing is like an improvised happening.
>
> This is the actual thing the film is based on. In which the gods and goddesses interact and in *The Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* it's the legend of Bacchus that's the pivotal thing and it ends with the God being torn to pieces by the Bacchantes. This is the underlying thing. But rather than using a specific ritual, which would entail quite a lot of the spoken word as ritual does, I wanted to create a feeling of being carried into a world of wonder. And the use of color and phantasy is progressive; in other words, it expands, it becomes completely subjective—like when people take communion; and one sees it through their eyes. (Kenneth Anger)

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Kustom Kar Kommandos
1965, color, 3½ minutes
Concept, direction and editing by Kenneth Anger. Camera assistant: Arnold Baskin. Music by The Parris Sisters. Filmed in San Bernadino. Cast: Sandy Trent (Car Customiser).

To the soundtrack of "Dream Lover," a young man strokes his customized car with a powder puff.

Kustom Kar Kommandos was originally to be an eight part, 30 minute film which Anger described as "an oneiric vision of a contemporary American (and specifically Californian) teenage phenomenon, the world of hot-rod and customized cars." Anger made the episode presently shown as *Kustom Kar Kommandos* to raise funds to finish the film, but was unable to do so and the project was abandoned.

Pygmalion and his machine mistress. (Kenneth Anger)

Kustom Kar Kommandos evokes the Dream Lover, but as a blind for the Charioteer of the Tarot Trumps. Infinitely more subtly, it restates the theme of *Fireworks*, it is about the simultaneous longing for, and illusory attainment of an ideal. Anger's camera, gliding with the delicacy of a scrap of down, caresses it with a giant white powder puff. The images are suffused with a pink glow from the background, the Maker appears in complementary azure. The film starts with a "waking" image of the Kar door opening into the camera, to show the Scorpio-red inside, and then moves through ten lingering, indefinable dissolves which completely circle the Kar, eventually returning to the original shot, but with the Maker this time getting into the Kar, settling, and driving off. The images centre on the powder puff, twice brushed by tiny erotic gusts, the incarnation of the spirit of a movie: very campy, but also achingly precarious. In a hallucinatory shot of Sandy's reflection on the inside of the passenger Kar door, there is a moment of fusion—the colour elements (pink, azure, red, and the dull amber of the Kar itself) fuse, and the Maker and Kar are one. The final shot of the sequence shows his face, serene, impassive, moving as if directed by some non-conscious force; he drives off. "Every night I hope and pray a Dream Lover will come my way." (Tony Rayns)

Scorpio Rising
1963, color, 29 minutes
Concept, direction, camera and editing by Kenneth Anger. Music by Little Peggy March, the Angels, Bobby Vinton, Elvis Presley, Ray Charles, The Ran-Dells, Kris Jensen, Claudine Clark, Gene McDaniels, The Surfaris. Filmed in Brooklyn and Manhattan. Cast: Bruce Byron (Scorpio), Johnny Sapienza (Taurus), Frank Carifi (Leo), John Palone (Pinstripe), Ernie Allo (Joker), Barry Rubin (Fall Guy), Steve Crandell (Blondie), Bill Dorfman (Back), Johnny Dodds (Kid).

A Magick ritual in four parts using a motorcycle gang, juxtaposed with mythic figures from Hollywood, politics and religion, as its central force, with commentary in the form of thirteen 1950's and 60's pop songs.

In 1962, Anger began to make *Scorpio Rising*. He did research on motorcycling and became friendly with a group of Brooklyn bikers whom he says were "terribly touched by anyone that shows any interest in the thing they dig" and called them "the last romantics of this particular culture," the equivalents of cowboys.

When first shown, the film caused numerous scandals and lawsuits—and not merely because of the brief male nudity; perhaps the most bizarre suit came from the American Nazi Party which claimed that Anger had desecrated the swastika.

A conjuration of the Presiding Princes, Angels and Spirits of the Sphere of *Mars*, formed as a "high" view of the Myth of the American motorcyclist. The Power Machine seen as tribal totem, from toy to terror. Thanatos in chrome and black leather and bursting jeans.

Part I: Boys & Bolts (masculine fascination with the Thing that Goes).
Part II: Image Maker (getting high on heroes: Dean's Rebel and Brando's Johnny: the True View of J.C.)
Part III: Walpurgis Party (J.C. wallflower at cycler's Sabbath).
Part IV: Rebel Rouser (The Gathering of the Dark Legions, with a message from Our Sponsor).

Dedicated to Jack Parsons, Victor Childe, Jim Powers, James Dean, T.E. Lawrence, Hart Crane, Kurt Mann, The Society of Spartans, The Hell's Angels, and all overgrown boys who will ever follow the whistle of Love's brother. (Kenneth Anger)

Sado-masochism, death and sensuality, sex and angst—*Scorpio* is America's buried collective adolescence manifested in the isolated pop-art visions of decayed dreams. It reflects the last gasp of the dying Age of Pisces (Christianity) as a motorcycle race roaring toward oblivion . . . (Carel Rowe)

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Invocation of My Demon Brother
1969, color, 11 minutes
Concept, direction, camera and editing by Kenneth Anger. Sound by Mick Jagger (Moog synthesizer). Filmed in San Francisco. Cast: Speed Hacker (Wand-bearer), Lenore Kandel (Deaconess), William Beutel (Deacon), Kenneth Anger (Magus), Van Leuven (Acolyte), Harvey Bialy (Brother), Timotha (Sister), Anton Szandor La Vey (Satan), Bobby Beausoleil (Lucifer).

A concentrated Magickal collage founded on the confrontation of opposites in which Lucifer, the Bringer of Light, is called forth.

In 1967, the footage for Anger's *Lucifer Rising* was stolen by Anger's Lucifer, Bobby Beausoleil, who was later convicted for his participation in the Charles Manson murders. After a severe depression and a public renunciation of filmmaking via a full-page *In Memoriam* in *The Village Voice,* Anger entered a new period of productivity during which he made *Invocation* from the original *Lucifer Rising.*

Invocation of My Demon Brother (Arrangement in Black and Gold). The shadowing forth of Our Lord Lucifer, as the Powers of Darkness gather at midnight mass. The dance of the Magus widdershins around the Swirling Spiral Force, the solar swastika, until the Bringer of Light—Lucifer—breaks through. "The true Magick of Horus requires the passionate union of opposites"—Aleister Crowley. (Kenneth Anger)

It is Anger's most metaphysical film; here he eschews literal connections, makes the images jar against one another, and does not create a center of gravity through which the collage is to be interpreted, as the images of Christ could be interpreted through the actions of the motorcyclists in *Scorpio* or as the images of Crowley could be interpreted through the ritual of *Inauguration.* Thus deprived of a center of gravity, every image has equal weight in the film, and more than ever before in an Anger film, the burden of synthesis falls upon the viewer. (P. Adams Sitney)

Puce Moment
1949, 6½ minutes, color
Concept, direction, camera and editing by Kenneth Anger. Music by Jonathan Halper. Filmed in Hollywood. Cast: Yvonne Marquis (Star).

A lavishly colored evocation of the Hollywood now gone, as shown through an afternoon in the milieu of a 1920's film star.

Puce Moment is a fragment from an abandoned film project entitled *Puce Woman.* The soundtrack used here is the second one; the first was the overture to Verdi's *I Villi.* The film reflects Anger's concerns with the myths and decline of Hollywood, as well as with the ritual of dressing, with the movement from the interior to the exterior, and with color and sound synchronization. Although it was made in 1949, it is placed in this cycle after *Invocation of My Demon Brother,* in Anger's words, "to balance somewhat 'heavy' subject matter with 'light' subject matter, and a longer film with a shorter one." As well, the descending movement of the film star at the end of *Puce Moment,* which is recapitulated and reversed in the ascension of Lilith in the following—and final—film, *Lucifer Rising,* and the featuring of women in these two works make an interesting and successful juxtaposition.

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Lucifer Rising, Part I
1974, color, 25 minutes
Concept, direction and editing by Kenneth Anger. Camera assistant: Michael Cooper, Alistair Londonderry. Music: Jimmy Page. Filmed in Luxor, Karnak, Gizeh, Externsteine, London, Avebury. Cast of Part I: Miriam Bibril (Isis), Donald Cammell (Osiris), Marianne Faithfull (Lilith), Kenneth Anger (Magus), Leslie Huggins (Lucifer).

The ascension of Lucifer (Horus), bringer of light, invoked by Isis, Osiris, Lilith and the Magus.

Anger's exaltation of the Aquarian Age, *Lucifer Rising, Part I* has been beset with problems—from cast changes (Leslie Huggins, the present Lucifer is also the fifth to play the role) to stolen footage to financial difficulties. Part I, for which Anger, utilizing tomb paintings as models, designed sets, makeup and costumes, was completed in 1974. The remainder of the film will appear hopefully in the near future.

> Isis (Nature) wakes, Osiris (Death) answers. Lilith (Destroyer) climbs to the Place of Sacrifice. The Magus activates the Circle until Lucifer—Bringer of Light—breaks through . . . It's a sympathetic view of what's usually called the devil, the personification of evil. The title implies that Lucifer is forgiven, ascending back to heaven—heresy according to Catholicism. I don't think the Protestants have gotten around to these details. (Kenneth Anger)
>
> *Lucifer Rising* attempts to transcend the passive-active dialectics of power and the sexual preoccupations of adolescence, "the blue of eternal longing." Its theme (so far) is that of man's reunion with his lost gods: the dawning of a new morality. The cult of arrested adolescence is replaced by the fulfillment of its longing: reaffirmation of identity through spiritual communion between man, gods and nature. Fantasy and reality are no longer distinguished but are parts of a larger, more complete universe . . .
>
> *Lucifer* is also a radical departure in visual form from Anger's previous works. No longer does the power of any given image depend on ritualistic repetition and recombination which essentially shapes the overall form of films like *Scorpio* or *Invocation* . . .
>
> The fragment presents a whole vision in itself. With *Lucifer*, Anger breaks through his previous nihilism to a "happy ending" (the Crowleyan assertion of love and joy over sorrow and sin), dealing with larger, exterior concerns rather than dramas of occult exoticism and decadent ideology. The sun breaks through the clouds.
> (Carel Rowe)

(All films are 16mm, sound, 24fps and on loan from the artist unless otherwise noted.)

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